Tourism and Its Impact on Quality of Life: Evidence from Kamarpukur, West Bengal, India

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ABSTRACT

Tourism is one of the fastest growing industry in World in general and India in particular. This present study tried to focuses on how the quality of life of people will improve through tourism development in Kamarpukur, West Bengal. Tourism has always acts as a catalyst to develop local economy, improve socio-cultural changes and life style of the people residing in and around different tourist locations. This current study also focuses on how empowerment of women as well as quality of life can be changed through rural tourism development in Kamarpukur in particular and West Bengal in general. The main purpose of this study is to find out different purposes of visit to this destination and to explore the reasons for which tourism development in Kamarpukur has created tremendous impact on local economy, life style and socio-cultural changes among the rural people. This paper mainly emphasized on tourism and its impact on role of women in promoting rural economy in the state of West Bengal with special emphasis on Pallimangal of Kamarpukur. There is always a wide scope for the women empowerment through tourism development in West Bengal. However, the state government including private agencies, NGOs, Self-Help Groups, should come forward to encourage and facilitate women in tourism related activities who are considered to be the backbone for improving the West Bengal economy.

KEYWORDS
QOL, Rural Tourism, Socio Economic Condition, Women Empowerment

INTRODUCTION

Empowerment of women is one of key issues for many countries including India in the 21st century. To achieve higher growth rate in their respective countries as well as states, different governments and non-government organizations including NGOs are continuously trying to empower the women through tourism, which is now considered to be one of the fastest growing Industry in the world. Tourism is found a prominent industry for achieving community development through women empowerment. Tourism, being a relatively new industry many new employment opportunities exist for women, both within the formal and informal sector (Sharma, 2004). In the year 2010 the first conscious attempt was made to develop a proper quantitative framework for monitoring the status of women working in tourism industry across the globe (Global Report on Women in Tourism, 2010). This paper tried to highlight the scope of developing rural tourism in West Bengal, which is

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having a rich cultural and religious heritage that will pave the way for sustainable development with women empowerment as a major goal. Rural tourism is expected to emerge as an important key factor for achieving sustainable development including poverty alleviation, employment generation, environmental regeneration and development of infrastructure and empowerment of women. This paper tried to prove that how a tourist site, which was, once located in extreme rural locations has become limelighted due to its historical importance or publicity by the local government and they have developed into a rural tourism village which in turn provide a variety of improvements not only in civic amenities, road and rail connection but also improvement in hospitality and cottage industry.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Moglen (1983), the term really took off with literature discussing empowerment of marginalized peoples, such as women and the poor, and especially with respect to community development. In 1983, for example, the Women's Studies International Forum talked about empowerment of women in “Power and Empowerment.” From then until now, the literature has ever more been focused on these issues. In 2010, research articles were published entitled “Power and empowerment: Fostering effective collaboration in meeting the needs of orphans and vulnerable children” Wallis (2010) and “Women empowerment through the SHG approach” Augustine (2010) that demonstrate just a few ways how empowerment is being discussed in the academic community.

Ufomata (2000) added the evidence from Africa; a woman is defined by her marriage roles and the husbands, the neighborhood as well as in laws has an upper hand in decision making. DFID (2005) defines women’s empowerment as “A process of transforming gender relations through groups or individuals developing awareness of women’s subordination and building their capacity to challenge it.”

According to Kabeer (1999: 473), empowerment refers to “the expansion in people’s ability to make strategic life choices in a context where this ability was previously denied to them.” An almost similar definition is given by Sen as the “expansion of capabilities of persons to lead the kinds of lives they value” (Sen, 1999: 18). In addition, Deshmukh-Ranadive (2003) argues that empowerment does not happen when incomes are generated and livelihoods enhanced, because this does not change the hierarchies and structures at household and family levels.

The author characterizes empowerment as a person’s freedom to do and achieve the desired goals (Sen, 1985). This framework of empowerment focuses on the individual. Other authors take a slightly more conical approach, taking into deliberation the institutional, social or political structures rules and norms within which the actors make and follow their choices. Alsop, Bertelsen and Holland (2007) in “Empowerment in Practice from Analysis to Implementation” define empowerment as the process of enhancing an individual’s capacity to make choices and then transforming those choices into the sought-after outcome. Similarly, in an article written in 2002 entitled “Empowerment and Poverty Reduction” by Narayan (2007), the definition of empowerment is seen as increasing poor people’s freedom of choice and action to shape their own lives.

All these authors viewed their definition of empowerment (women) in different context in relation to various organizations. The authors agreed that empowerment is multidimensional and it can be exercised on different levels with different domains (Alsop, Bertelsen & Holland, 2006). Empowerment can look different at the individual level versus the community level, and it can look different in the state versus the market. Empowerment is also relational, for it occurs in relation to whom a person interacts with.

Narayan (2005) and Mason (2005) are quick to point out that empowerment is not a zero-sum game, but rather different types of power, such as power over, power to, power with, and power within. Finally, the literature stresses that empowerment is extremely cultural specific, and this can be seen in the articles written by Malhotra and Mather (1997), Mason (2005) and Narayan (2005). Briedenhann & Wickens represents that the benefit of tourism is that it is seen as a means of alternative development strategy for economic & social regeneration of rural areas, as a catalyst to stimulate economic growth,
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